

The Mercy of God Almighty, Part 5 - Romans 9:17-18 – August 5th, 2012

- Today's teaching will be part five of a series I've titled; "The Mercy of God Almighty."
- By way of introduction, I sort of need to warn you that what we're about to see has the propensity to create more questions than it does answers.
- Understanding this will require us to navigate our way through the text by giving permission to the Holy Spirit to lead us into the truth that's herein.

William Newell - We have now come upon that passage of Scripture against which the human mind—or rather heart, rebels most of all. For it sets the creature as he really is before God... Nevertheless, it will be our only safe path to receive just as *God writes it down*, the truth we find here.

- I must say as gnarly as Roman's nine has been thus far, it has most certainly answered a number of difficult questions related to God's character.
- Here-to-fore the Apostle Paul, by the Holy Spirit, has answered questions like how I can have a heart for the lost, and love those who hate me.
- In addition to that, he's also answered how I can know if I'm a true Christian, how can a God of love hate, and even the question of is God unjust.

- In verses seventeen and eighteen, Paul rises from the passage and answers the question of why some people harden their hearts towards God.
- v17 Paul brings Pharaoh into the discussion saying that he was raised up for the purpose of God displaying His power and proclaiming His name.
- v18 He then says again that God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He also hardens the heart of whom He wants to harden.
- At first glance we have a problem in the sense that it would appear that once again, God just arbitrarily chooses whose heart He will harden.

- Before we answer the question that's on the table, we must first resolve this problem of God seeming arbitrary and unfair in hardening the heart.
- Actually, it's for this reason that the Apostle Paul brings Pharaoh into the discussion. He needs to use this example of a heart hard towards God.
- Now it's vital we know a little bit of the back story in order to better understand why it is that Paul would use Pharaoh to answer our question.

- The book of Exodus records for us the account of how God told Moses to go back to Pharaoh and deliver the Israelites out of the hands of Egypt.

Exodus 4:21-23 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel *is* My son, My firstborn. 23 So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn."

- Notice that God tells Moses He will harden Pharaoh's heart. He even tells him the reason is that he won't let them go until their firstborn sons die.
- In other words, God foreknew what Pharaoh would do or maybe better said, what Pharaoh would not do, namely, he wouldn't let God's people go.
- God foreknows that Pharaoh's hardened heart will force Him to bring death to the firstborn of Egypt, in order to release the firstborn of God, Israel.

- The reason this is so germane to our understanding in solving this problem, is it's one of twenty times we read of Pharaoh's heart being hardened.
- Ten of those twenty times, we're told that Pharaoh hardened his heart towards God, and the other ten we're told God hardened Pharaoh's heart.
- This suggests every time Pharaoh hardened his heart towards God, we have the same amount of times that Pharaoh's heart is hardened by God.

- This begs the question of whether or not God is being fair or not. It seems to imply Pharaoh was kind hearted before God made him hard hearted.
- If this line of thinking is embraced, then we need look no further as to why it is that some see God as having hardened His heart towards them.
- Perhaps this explains why some people harden their hearts toward God, they're deceived and believed God's heart is hardened towards them.

- If this is starting to sound familiar and similar to what we saw prior in this chapter, that's because it's familiar and similar to what we've seen prior.
- Let me explain, the common denominator with all of these questions is that Satan's evil fingerprints are all over them in how he's perverted them.
- Satan has succeeded in turning it backwards, and in so doing, put the blame on God, which makes God out to be evil, instead of God being good.

- The Devil has us to believe God un-lovingly and unfairly hardened His heart towards Pharaoh, so in turn Pharaoh's heart hardened towards God.
- The fact of the matter is, nothing could be further from the truth, and it's actually the opposite that is the truth. Pharaoh's heart hardened first.
- It was only when Pharaoh had already first hardened his heart that God in turn gave Pharaoh over to the hardness of his sin calloused heart.

- I suppose another way to say it would be that God was affirming and confirming Pharaoh's already hard heart and not forcing His heart on him.
- By way of illustration, the heat from the same sun that shines result in different affects. The sun can either harden the clay, or it can melt the wax.
- In Pharaoh's case, God's power displayed in the plagues, hardened the clay of his heart, thus God allowed Pharaoh to harden his own heart.

- Herein lies the answer to the question that's on the table of our teaching today, why is it that some people will harden their hearts towards God?
- I'm of the belief, like Pharaoh, they don't like the message that's declared to them by their Moses and Aaron, and react by hardening their hearts.
- The message from the Son, like the sun, has the affect of hardening their hearts, instead of melting and softening their hearts towards God.

- I can't get over how merciful God is to Pharaoh by lifting the plagues after he begs Moses to stop them; even then he still hardens his heart again.
- So too is this true for people who are the recipients of God's mercy, once they've tasted from the cup of relief, they just harden their hearts again.
- What's interesting to me is how that God in His mercy will give people so many chances lifting the harsh plagues on their lives, yet it's to no avail.

1 Samuel 6:6 NIV Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When he treated them harshly, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?

- This brings us to a second reason that I believe people will harden their hearts towards God. It's that they misinterpret the mercy of God almighty.
- Here's how I get there, like Pharaoh, they misinterpret God's mercy by thinking that the lifting of the plague is a sign of God's tolerance to their sin.
- In other words, when God in His mercy chooses not to execute His judgment quickly, or provides relief temporarily, mans heart will harden more.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 NKJV Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

- There's actually even a third reason I believe that people will harden their hearts towards God, and it has to do with the other gods in their lives.
- Here's why I believe that, every single one of the ten plagues on Egypt were a judgment against one of the over three thousand gods of Egypt.
- Perhaps you'll indulge me as I quickly connect these dots, as I think I'd be grossly remiss were I not to explain how these gods are alive today.
- By the way, this is why Paul says in verse 17 that God raised Pharaoh up that He might display His power and proclaim His name in all the earth.

- This was both a declaration and a demonstration of God supernaturally and miraculously exercising His power, being omnipotent, over their gods.

PLAGUE ON EGYPT	GOD OF EGYPT
Nile River turned to blood	Hapi - god of the Nile
Frogs coming from the Nile River	Heket - goddess of fertility water and renewal
Lice coming from the dust of the earth	Geb - god of the earth
Swarms of flies	Khepri - god of creation movement of the Sun and rebirth
Death of cattle and livestock	Hathor - goddess of love and protection
Ashes turned to boils and sores	Isis - goddess of medicine and peace
Hail rained down in the form of fire	Nut - goddess of the sky
Locusts sent from the sky	Seth - god of storms and disorder
Three days of complete darkness	Ra - the sun god
Death of the firstborn	Pharaoh – the ultimate power of Egypt

<http://inthedoghouse.hubpages.com/hub/Ten-Plagues-For-Ten-Gods>

- The reason I deemed it necessary to take the time and go into all of this is because there's nothing new under the sun; you'll forgive the pun.
- What I mean by that is, the names have been changed to protect these false gods from being exposed as the gods that are worshipped today.
- We don't call them by their ancient names, but they are still worshipped by their new names, which are commonly known by, and in, the world.

Ancient Names of Some False Gods	Contemporary Names of the Same Gods
The god of Mammon.	The god of money and success.
The goddess Ashtoreh.	The goddess of sex and fertility.
The god of Baal.	The god of power and prestige.
The god of Molech.	The god of convenience and prosperity.

- While I am keenly aware that none of us have a Molech god in our back yard or lanai, I wonder about the other gods that we may have there.

Financial security	Pleasure
Materialism	Comfort
Knowledge	Convenience
Power and Control	Pain free, trouble free life
Sex	Accomplishment
Money and prosperity	Work, business or career
Self	Significance and success
Health	Physical appearance
Another person	Happiness

- Here's the take away for today and again I'll pose it in a question, how will I know I'm serving these other masters and not the true and living God?

- My focus will be on it
- My looking will be to it
- My adoration will be of it
- My sacrifices will be for it
- My submission will be to it
- My seeking will be after it
- My trust will be in it
- My giving will be to it
- My serving will be of it
- My speaking will be about it
- My investment will be in it
- My heart will be hardened by it